UNITED
NATIONS

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Economic and Social
Council

Distr.
GENERAL

E/CN.4/1998/128
10 March 1998

Original: ENGLISH

COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS
Fifty-fourth session
Items 4 and 12 of the provisional agenda

QUESTION OF THE VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE OCCUPIED ARAB TERRITORIES, INCLUDING PALESTINE

RACISM, RACIAL DISCRIMINATION, XENOPHOBIA AND RELATED INTOLERANCE

Letter dated 16 February 1998 from the Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations Office at Geneva addressed to the Chairman of the Commission on Human Rights

In the course of the deliberations on item 4 on the agenda of the fifty-third session of the Commission on Human Rights, the PLO observer made a highly offensive racial remark, gravely wounding the deepest sensitivities of Israelis and indeed of Jews everywhere. While the Secretary-General of the United Nations has openly criticized that slur, the Commission has not yet moved to disassociate itself from this manifestation of racism in its midst.

In the past, the Commission has taken action against such aberrations. For example, during the Commission's forty-seventh session in 1991, anti-Semitic remarks similar to those of the PLO observer were made. The Chairman responded forcefully through an unequivocal letter to the then United States Ambassador of 3 July 1991, in which he stressed that racist or discriminatory sentiments must not be tolerated, since they are contrary to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and threaten to neutralize much of the salutary work done by the international system since its adoption. Similarly, when an affront to another religion was perceived in a report submitted to the fifty-third session by a special rapporteur, the Commission wasted no time in adopting a decision on 18 April 1997, expressing indignation and protest, and calling for corrective action (which had since been taken).

The Commission can still act through its Bureau in the present case, essentially by distancing itself unambiguously from the PLO observer's remarks and by reiterating that racialist comments, of any kind, are totally inadmissible in the proceedings of the Commission - or in any other United Nations body, for that matter. At risk is the credibility and the reputation of the Commission and indeed of the United Nations system as a whole.

In the absence of decisive public action by the Bureau, I am instructed to inform you that the delegation of Israel to the fifty-fourth session of the Commission will find itself unable to participate in the debate on item 4 on the provisional agenda. Israel cannot pass over crude anti-Semitism in silence.

I should be grateful if this letter could be circulated as an official document under items 4 and 12 on the provisional agenda (before the opening of the fifty-fourth session).

[Signed]: Yosef LAMDAN
Ambassador
Permanent Representative